
THE FACTOR OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION IN CRIME PREVENTION

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Abstract

The article explores the factor of Christian religion in crime prevention. In particular, the article investigates three aspects: first, it concerns the existing attitude related to the negative influence of religion on crime prevention; second, a neutral attitude of religion in relation to crime prevention, is investigated, and third, empirical studies on the correlation between religion and crime are analyzed.

The objective of the article is to reveal what kind of relation exists between faith of God, spiritual and moral development, and thus, living according the virtuous rules and crime prevention. It turns out that religion plays a positive role in crime reduction only. Moreover, spiritual life is the most effective way to correct the offender, which in turn provides the maximum result in the crime prevention.

Deriving from the results of the study, a conclusion is made at the end of the article, which should be taken into account in order to properly understand the crime prevention policy and tackle the existing challenges related to crime prevention.

Keywords: *religion, faith, crime, criminality, prevention*

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Introduction

For half a century since Freud's discoveries, sociologists were unable to decide what position to take in relation to religion. It was assumed that religion inspired people to feel guilt, suppressed sexuality, preached anti-intellectualism and tyranny. But about twenty years ago, scientific data on the positive influence of religion finally convinced scientists of the fallacy of such opinions.¹

Nevertheless, there are scientists who do not fully agree with this position and develop opposite opinions, or take a more neutral position. Objectivity requires to analyze the mentioned different approaches based on this contrast, in order to see the real picture of which side positive science is leaning to.

It should be noted that there is also extensive literature on the mentioned issues, many criminological theories and concepts (e. g. Lombroso, Hirsch, Stark, etc.). However, it can be safely said that, in general, there are two approaches: 1) which does not fully share the positive role of religion in crime prevention, and 2) which is more indifferent, so to speak, takes a neutral position.

The subject of our study initially, is these two approaches, which will be analyzed based on the concepts of criminologists Kim Sadique and Tore Bjørge. Finally, and most importantly, the sources that describe the results of studies on the influence of religion on crime will be analyzed.

1. For the Question of the Negative Impact of Religion on Crime

Based on criminological theories, Prof. Kim Sadique analyzes the question of the influence of religion on crime and deviance, asks the question: "The key question that remains for many scholars is "Do religious beliefs and behaviours prevent crime and/or deviancy?"² and replies: "The presumption has always been that it does have a preventative effect, but the unequivocal proof and the reasons behind such "effects" are elusive. Certainly, the common sense view is that "religion reduces the likelihood of crime", and research in both Britain and the USA suggest that at least one-third of the citizens in these countries believe that religion provides a sociocultural and/or spiritual foundation for preventing criminal behaviour. However, it would be remiss not to consider that in the current climate with countless conflicts defined as "religiously motivated", issues regarding both the sexual abuse of children by "people of faith" and the increasing number of Islamophobic attacks, some may argue religion causes (rather than prevents) crime and deviance".³

In terms of Christian teachings, with regard to the assessment of K. Sadique, it should be noted that among the world's religions, Christianity is the most humane religion, as in Christianity God is love (1 John 4, 8), who calls us to love one another (1 John 4, 11) and among them, even to love enemy (Luke. 6, 27). In addition, a religion that considers even the adoption of immoral thoughts as a sin cannot call the persons who commits the sin a "people of faith, or cannot justify sexual abuse, or even" religiously motivated extremism.

¹ Seligman M., (2006). New Positive Psychology, A Scientific Perspective on Happiness and the Meaning of Life (translated from English, published by „Sofia“), M., p. 87 (in Russian).

² Sadique K., (2016). The Effect of Religion on Crime and Deviancy: Hellfire in the Twenty-First Century, see: Religion, Faith and Crime: Theories, Identities and Issues (eds. Kim Sadique, Perry Stanislas), Palgrave Macmillan, UK, p. 21.

³ Ibid.

As for the assumption made about „religiously motivated“ conflicts and crimes committed by „people of faith that“ some may argue that religion causes crime, this is nothing, but to blame a God. The interpretation of the facts in such manner, is identical to the reasoning of Adam and Eve, when instead of repenting, they shifted placed the burden of their guilt on God: „The Adam replied, the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate“ (Gen. 3, 12).

Now, let's consider the same issue from the point of view of the Islamic religion. Kh. Tsiklauri in her thesis „the Study of Religious Values of Believers and Atheists in Georgia“, notes that terrorist acts committed in the name of religion by the followers of the Muslim religion have recently become more frequent. All this may raise doubts, does Islam preach violence? To this question, *Beglar Kamashidze*, Mufti of Administration of Muslims of all Georgia, makes the following explanation, which we provide without change:

"Terrorism is the most heinous crime. According to the Holy Quran, killing one person is equivalent to the destruction of mankind. Anyone who does this rejects the call of the Holy Qur'an, and therefore, according to Islamic dogma, is condemned as a unbeliever. Eternal hell awaits his soul... It is outrageous when terrorism attributed to Islam. A true Muslim cannot be a terrorist because the intermediary Muhammad preaches peace and love. It is said that the kamikadze, who deprived his own life and the lives of others, shouted "Allah Akbar" before the terrorist attack... He is a murderer who took the worst sin upon himself. The words "Merciful" and "Forgiver" appear in this cry. Is it possible to kill a person before uttering "Merciful" and "Forgiver"?! And when asked why Islam allows Jihad, Mufti replies that Jihad is declared by the state when the country's territorial integrity and religion are under threat. Islam does not allow a separate group to declare jihad individually, even in a combat form.⁴

In the thesis of Kh. Tsiklauri, we also read that "study (Emmons, Chang, Teran, 1998) tested the hypothesis that religiosity and spirituality reduce conflict and increase harmony in the entire human system. The results of studies by Emmons, Chang, and Teran confirmed the thesis of Tillich, Allport, and James that a high proportion of spiritual aspirations is associated with a low rate of conflict in the overall human system, that religion can be a force that amalgamates a person"⁵.

Studies have also prove that religious faith is a source of human health and happiness. For example: C. Jung based on many years of communication with his patients, came to the conclusion that "the vast majority of people are engaged in the search for religious beliefs. They become sick when they lose their life-giving faith, and are do not cured until they return to their religious beliefs"⁶. For Jung, a person's religious beliefs are not limited to adherence to a faith or membership of a religious organization. According to him, this is a relationship with such a power that a person worships and loves.⁷

According to Seligman, American Christians are physically healthier and live longer. Faithful mothers of children with disabilities cope better with depression. In addition, religious people find it easier to cope with divorce, layoffs, illness, and the death of loved ones.⁸ Seligman also concludes, "the facts show that believers are much happier and more satisfied with life than atheists"⁹.

Finally, it should be noted that "every developed religion preaches love, honesty, conscientiousness, benevolence, doing good, honoring parents, love for Motherland. That is why it is sometimes said that there is only one God, but there are many ways to reach him"¹⁰.

As we can see, the hypothesis that "religion causes crime" is completely groundless. Religion does not justify, but prohibits and condemns crime. Religion does not differentiate who commits crime, believer or an

⁴ Newspaper "Kviris Palitra" (2016), November 24, retrieved from thesis: *Tsiklauri Kh.*, A Study of the Values of Believers and Atheists in Georgia (dissertation paper), Georgian University named after St. Andria the First, Tbilisi, p 52 (in Georgian).

⁵ *Tsiklauri Kh.*, (2016). A Study of the Values of Believers and Atheists in Georgia (thesis), Georgian University named after St. Andria the First, Tbilisi, p. 48 (in Georgian).

⁶ Ibid, p. 46.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Seligman M.*, (2006). New Positive Psychology, A Scientific Perspective on Happiness and the Meaning of Life (translated from English, published by "Sofia"), M., p. 87 (in Russian).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Shoshiashvili Sh.*, (2003). About the Cosmic World and the Immortality of the Soul, (ed. Neli Elizbarashvili), published by "Neckeri", Tbilisi, p. 126 (in Georgian).

“atheist”. Based on the abovementioned, the problem resides not in God or religion, but should be sought in the disbelief of man.

2. Holistic Model of Crime Prevention

Like C. Beccaria and J. Bentham, the Norwegian criminologist T. Bjørgo also believes that theoretical considerations regarding preventive measures lie in the deterrent effect of the fear of punishment. T. Bjørgo also shares the opinion that before committing a crime, a person rationally assesses the benefits and the negative consequences that may accompany the crime. In this estimation, the real mechanism is the decision-making process that takes place in the mind of person.¹¹ A Norwegian criminologist notes that "it is difficult to say that everyone will make the same decision in this process, because a person's inner qualities and situation can greatly influence on his final decision".¹²

Conceptual aspects of the Christian doctrine about crime/criminality prevention are indeed read in the mentioned discussion, because the discourse is about: 1. making a decision at mental level before committing a crime, and 2. the internal qualities of the person that influence on the decision-making, which implies motives i.e. passions, the transcendent nature and the scientific position of which, are well known.

At first glance, the "Comprehensive Crime Prevention Model" may appear to echo Christian teachings, but this is not the case.

The "Comprehensive Crime Prevention Model" developed by Bjørgo, envisages nine mechanisms of crime prevention to be applied against all types of crime.¹³

The first mechanism is "the creation of normative barriers to prevent crime, which means that an informal means of control, such as morality, should be applied to any crime. Bjørgo also refers to the "Situational Action Theory, according to which "human morality is the main reason why people refrain from committing crimes".¹⁴

Formulation of the issue in such way, a is in line with the Christian doctrine, however, it is clear that the discussion implies morality only of human and majority. According to Bjørgo, "the given moral ideas... in the positive socialization process of person are developed in the course of his/her upbringing..." and "self-control is the ability to act line with one's own moral standards, ... which engages in actions when there is a moral conflict between one' morality and the morality of society, meaning the common morality".¹⁵

The fact that *Bjørgo* makes no reference to the Divine morality in normative barriers, should not be surprising, as in positive law, conventional and individual morality does not necessarily coincide with the Divine morality.

Although *T. Bjørgo* only hints at the use of theological approaches in his work¹⁶, the morality mentioned in the normative barriers cannot be equated with Christian morality.

The second mechanism is "reducing the person's involvement/enrollment in criminal social environment or activities. The essence of this mechanism is as follows: a. to prevent a person from committing a crime, be-

¹¹ *Bjørgo T.*, (2016). Preventing Crime. A Holistic Approach, Palgrave Macmillan UK., p. 36.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 31.

¹³ 1. Normative barriers to committing criminal acts; 2. Reducing recruitment to criminal social environments and activities; 3. Deterrence through threats of punishment or other negative sanctions; 4. Disrupting criminal acts; 5. Incapacitation – denying the ability to carry out criminal acts; 6. Protecting vulnerable targets; 7. Reducing the harmful consequences of crime; Reducing the rewards from crime; 9. Quitting crime: Desistance and rehabilitation, see: *Bjørgo T.*, (2016). Preventing Crime. A Holistic Approach, Palgrave Macmillan UK, p. 50-66.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 43, 45.

¹⁶ 1. It is mentioned that at micro level, the qualities of the prevention actors are of great significance when it comes to the degree to which their measures have the desired effects: which profession implements the relevant measures (e. g. the police, youth workers, religious leaders or teachers); 2. "Such moral barriers to burgling or stealing from others are some of the fundamental norms the vast majority of us are deeply imbued with during our upbringing by our parents, school and other moral authorities. This norm also stands strong in religious moral systems. "Thou shalt not steal" is the seventh commandment in the Judeo-Christian tradition", see: *Bjørgo T.*, (2016). Preventing Crime. A Holistic Approach, Palgrave Macmillan UK, p. 29 and 72.

cause if a person commits a crime once, the likelihood of him to commit a crime again, increases, and b. since in social environment of prison, a crime is considered to be normal and positive phenomenon, the likelihood of recidivism increases, which is observed in young offenders (*Sutherland*)¹⁷.

It is noteworthy that Bjørge sees the solution of this problem in the settling of social and economic problems,¹⁸ while it is evident to scientists that only the improvement of the mentioned conditions cannot give the desired result. To prove this, even recalling the fact about committing the first sin is enough. Can anyone argue that Adam and Eve's life in the Garden of Eden was not economically or socially ensured? Of course no. The first cause of crime, as we known well, was an evil, the transcendental power that incited the passion of arrogance in man. In addition, many Bible verses confirm that sin is often the result of pseudo prosperity (Deut. 32, 15; Nehem. 9, 28; Jer. 48, 11; Ezek. 16, 49; 28, 5). In this context, the statement that impunity increases the level of passion in a person and the desire to repeatedly commit sin is also axiomatic, which is well manifested in ludomania (addiction to gambling), drug use and any other antisocial actions.

Thus, the solution is to be found, first of all, in the sinful nature of man and transcendent power, and after in the lack of economic and social conditions, which is not mentioned and implied at all in Bjørge's second crime prevention mechanism.

All the other seven mechanisms of the „Comprehensive Crime Prevention Model can be analyzed in the same manner. However, the most noteworthy segment of Bjørge's paper is his statement that "the given Model clearly has a claim to be a Universal Model of Crime Prevention".¹⁹ The said Model is also referred in the paper as the "Perfect Model".²⁰

If any crime prevention model can claim to be "Universal or "Perfect without the religious factor, will be demonstrated by analysis of the scientific literature on the impact of religion on crime.

3. Analysis of Empirical Studies on the Influence of Religion on Crime/Criminality

From the extensive scientific literature on the correlation between religion and crime/criminality, the particularly noteworthy are the works of the famous criminologist, Prof. B. Johnson. Along with religion, criminology and criminal justice, the author examines the impact of religion on crime and draws relevant conclusions, for instance:

In the paper "Religious Participation and Criminal Behavior it is noted that: "empirical evidence confirms that the effects of religiosity in reducing crime remain significant even in communities typified by decay, poverty, disadvantage, and disorganization (Freeman 1986; Jang and Johnson 2001; Johnson et al. 2001, 2000a)".²¹ It also finds that "there is also increasing evidence that religious involvement may lower the risks of a broad range of delinquent behaviors, including both minor and serious forms of criminal behavior (Evans et al. 1996).²²

In total, Johnson analyzes 109 studies. Approximately 89 % of the studies (97/109) find an inverse or beneficial relationship between religion and some measure of crime or delinquency (i.e., increasing religiosity is associated with lower crime/delinquency). Although, only 11 studies found no association or reported mixed findings, and only one study found that religion was associated with a harmful outcome.²³

Johnson, like the American psychologist M. Seligman, also concludes that: "over the last several decades have made steady contributions to this emerging religiosity-crime literature, and yet, until recently, there was a lack of consensus about the nature of this relationship between religion and crime. Stated differently, in studies utilizing vastly different methods, samples, and research designs, increasing religiosity (religiousness,

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 47-48.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 48.

¹⁹ *Bjørge T.*, (2016). Preventing Crime. A Holistic Approach, Palgrave Macmillan UK, p. 19.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 19.

²¹ *Johnson B.R.*, (2014). Religious Participation and Criminal Behavior, quoted from the book: Effective Interventions in the Lives of Criminal Offenders, (eds. John A. Humphrey, Peter Cordella), published by „Springer“, New York, USA, p. 7.

²² *Ibid*, p. 8.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 9.

religious activities, or participation) is consistently linked with decreases in various measures of crime or delinquency. These findings are particularly pronounced among the more methodologically and statistically sophisticated studies that rely upon nationally representative samples".²⁴

Johnson, in conclusion states that: "Religion is a robust variable that tends to be associated with the lowered likelihood of crime or delinquency or recidivism and as such should no longer be overlooked by criminologists or social scientists. In fact, failure to consider religion variables will cause researchers to be needlessly shortsighted in estimating models designed to explain its direct and indirect influences on crime and delinquency".²⁵

As for *Johnson's* other work, namely "The Role of Religious Institutions in Regulating Crime and Delinquency", it is noted that regardless of socio-economic status, religious belief and practice not only protect against delinquent behaviour but, also foster positive and/or normative behaviour. In addition, it is also noted in the work that the studies confirm the positive role of religion and religious institutions in crime reduction, offender rehabilitation and offender aftercare".²⁶

In the book "More God, Less Crime", *B. Johnson* argues that the criminal justice system is in a state of deplorable state, and despite study showing the benefits of faith-based crime policy, many "experts" are too apathetic to include appropriate measures in their recommendations. This book is based on recent studies to make clear that any anti-crime policy must involve a partnership effort of state and religious faith.²⁷

Particularly interesting is chapter 5 of the book, in which *Johnson* makes a systematic analysis of all studies of the influence of religion on crime. A total of 272 studies published over 65 years were analyzed, representing the most exhaustive review of the literature ever undertaken. The conclusion from the review of the literature is that the vast majority support the idea that religion is a powerful antidote to crime.²⁸

Based on the analysis of scientific literature, many other scientists have made similar conclusions. For example, in the paper "Profile of Religiosity and their Association with Risk Behavior among Emerging Adults in the United States" the following is written: "Studies has shown that religious youth are less likely to use drugs (*Johnson, Sheets, & Kristeller, 2008*) and engage in less antisocial behavior, crime (*Baier & Wright, 2001*), and violence (*Salas-Wright, Vaughn, & Maynard, 2014*)".²⁹

Prof. *B. Ochieng*, in "Spirituality and the Black Community: Criminality, Victimization and Well-Being", concludes: "spirituality is particularly beneficial for the well-being of individuals experiencing harm and victimisation",³⁰ etc.

Finally, studies from the encyclopedia of social sciences, *Marrpedia*, becomes evident that, Metropolitan areas with high rates of congregational membership and areas with high levels of religious homogeneity tend to have lower homicide and suicide rates than other metropolitan areas.³¹ States with more religious populations tend to have fewer homicides and fewer suicides.³² It is noted that religious attendance is associated with direct decreases in both minor and major forms of crime and deviance, to an extent unrivalled by government welfare programs. There is a 57 percent decrease in likelihood to deal drugs and a 39 percent decrease

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Johnson B. R.*, (2011). The Role of Religious Institutions in Responding to Crime and Delinquency, quoted from the book: The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion, Oxford University Press (ed. Peter B. Clarke), online publication, p. 858-875.

²⁷ *Johnson B.R.*, (2011). More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How it Could Matter More, Templeton Press, USA.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 73-98.

²⁹ *Salas-Wright, Christopher P., Michael G. Vaughn, and Brandy R. Maynard.*, (2015). Profile of Religiosity and their Association with Risk Behavior among Emerging Adults in the United States (2014, Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood and SAGE Publications), Volume 3, Issue 2, p. 67-84, <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2167696814539327>>, (retrieved: 21.07.2020).

³⁰ *Ochieng B.*, (2016). Spirituality and the Black Community: Criminality, Victimization and Well-Being, see: Religion, Faith and Crime (eds. Kim Sadique, Perry Stanislas), Published by "Palgrave Macmillan", UK, p. 321.

³¹ *Hummer R.A., Ellison Chr.G., Rogers R.G., Moulton B.E., and Romero R.*, (2004). „Religious Involvement and Adult Mortality in the United States: Review and Perspective, "Southern Medical Journal 97, №12, p. 1224-1225, <http://marrpedia.org/effects_of_religious_practice_on_crime_rates>, (retrieved: 21.07.2022).

³² *Lester D.*, (1987). "Religiosity and Personal Violence: A Regional Analysis of Suicide and Homicide Rates", The Journal of Social Psychology 127, № 6, p. 685-686, <http://marrpedia.org/effects_of_religious_practice_on_crime_rates>, (retrieved: 22.07.2022).

in likelihood to commit a crime among the young, black inner city population if they attend religious services regularly.³³

Conclusion

Despite the different positions in science on the influence of religion and crime (crimes), it can be said with confidence that almost the vast majority of studies confirm the positive impact of religion on crime prevention. Leaving aside studies, it is logically impossible to consider religion as the cause of crime, because all the religions of the world condemn violence and extremism.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, the groundlessness of considering religion as the cause of crime is qualitatively confirmed by other studies, for example, studies conducted on existential matters. For example, in order to find out what a person sees the meaning of life, a population survey was conducted in different countries around the world. According to the results of the study, the percentages were distributed as follows: family and children – 38%; Profession, career – 25%; material well-being – 19%; Friends and own health – 18%; Freedom and independence – 12%. Religion ranks last at 2% and pet care at 1%.³⁴

This study is the best illustration that the causes of crime should not be attributed to God or religiously motivated actions, but only to disbelief of God. It is also paradoxical that science formally shares the theological doctrine in many respects. For example, science acknowledges the transcendental nature of a crime, the struggle of a thoughts that occur in the mind and the decision to commit a crime in the psyche, the fact that the psyche does not belong to the personal layer, etc.

In addition, in relation to the prevention of crime/criminality, the criminal law specialists themselves point to the ineffectiveness of the criminal law policy and emphasize the superiority of informal means of control, for example:

Raymond Peternoster, after a detailed review of the literature on the deterrence effect of punishment, notes that "the empirical evidence leads to the conclusion that there is a marginal deterrent effect for legal sanctions"³⁵. According to G. Nachkebia, "criminal law cannot eliminate the patterns of crimes"³⁶. Ugrekhelidze speaks about the positive role of divine law in the prevention of crime: "Heavenly law has a great preventive value, it forces people to be much more careful about their future. Isn't it better for you to partake of God's blessings initially, rather than to be forced to go to hell later on?"³⁷

In the context, when *T. Bjørgo* admits that the "morality of sinful man and of the majority is the main reason why they do not engage in criminal behaviour"³⁸ and that "conscience prevent a lot of crime"³⁹, it is impossible not to see the primacy of divine morality in comparison with sinful human morality, not to consider the role of the Church among other actors (subjects) in the prevention of crime, especially, when empirical studies prove the positive effect of religion and faith in preventing crime/criminality.

Thus, based on scientific studies and logical conclusions, it would be appropriate to conclude that in a comprehensive and perfect model of crime prevention, religion, belief in God, and service to God are the main mechanisms of crime prevention, and the rest are auxiliary mechanisms, because the cause of crime is spiritual, transcendental (in the ecclesiastical sense).

³³ Johnson B.R., Larson D.B., Li S.D., and Jang S.J., (2000). "Escaping from the Crime of Inner Cities: Church Attendance and Religious Salience Among Disadvantaged Youth", *Justice Quarterly* 17, №2, p. 377-339, <http://marripedia.org/effects_of_religious_practice_on_crime_rates>, (retrieved: 22.07.2022).

³⁴ What is the meaning of our suffering? (personal blog of Michael Laitman "Kabbalah, Science and the Meaning of Life"), (in Russian), <<https://www.laitman.ru/crisis/292908.html>>, (retrieved: 14.02.2022).

³⁵ Bjørgo T., (2016). Preventing Crime. A Holistic Approach, (ed. G. Giorgadze, M. Shalikashvili; trans. U. Bakhtadze), first Georgian edition Georgian-Norwegian Rule of Law Association, Tbilisi, 2016, p. 51 (in Georgian).

³⁶ Nachkibia G., (1998). The Subject of Criminal Law Science (ed. Z. Tsulaia), published by "Meridian", Tbilisi, p. 51 (in Georgian).

³⁷ TV Program, "Pulsi TV", Title "the Guest Mr. Mindia Ugrekhelidze – Part 2", (February 10, 2020, minutes: 15:00-15:30), see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMPI7p_OB1k>, (retrieved: 07.06.2020), (in Georgian).

³⁸ Bjørgo T., (2106). Preventing Crime. A Holistic Approach, (ed. G. Giorgadze, M. Shalikashvili; trans. U. Bakhtadze), first Georgian edition Georgian-Norwegian Rule of Law Association, Tbilisi, p. 43 (in Georgian).

³⁹ *Ibid*, 72.

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